

Message Text

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PAGE 01 FRANKF 04907 191405Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00

PA-01 ICA-11 SP-02 /037 W

-----125480 191432Z /53

R 191241Z JUN 78

FM AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2338

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

USMISSION USBERLIN

USMISSION USNATO

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

USAREUR

USAFE

USEUCOM

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USAREUR, USAFE, USEUCOM FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJ: HESSIAN FDP OPTS TO CONTINUE COALITION WITH SPD

REF: FRANKFURT 4697

1. IN THE SMALL TOWN OF SLORSHEIM NEAR FRANKFURT ON JUNE 17
THE HESSIAN FDP SEARCHED ITS COLLECTIVE SOULD FOR A FORMULA
FOR SURVIVAL AND DECIDED THAT AFTER THE OCTOBER 8 ELECTION
"IT IS PREPARED FOR A RENEWAL OF COOPERATION WITH THE CURRENT
MINISTER PRESIDENT HOLGER BORNER AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC
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PAGE 02 FRANKF 04907 191405Z

PARTY LED BY HIM IN HESSE." THE FORMULATION WILL HELP TO MAKE
THE CONTEST A PERSONAL ONE BETWEEN BORNER AND DREGGER.

2. THE KEY VOTE BY SECRET BALLOT SHOWED 173 DELEGATES IN
FAVOR OF CONTINUING THE SPD COALITION AS PROPOSED BY
THE LEADERSHIP; 113 WERE OPPOSED; AND 5 DELEGATES ABSTAINED.
HEEDING MISCHNICK'S APPEAL FOR A SHOW OF UNITY; THE CONVENTION

THE PROCEEDED TO ENDORSE THE MAJORITY DECISION BY A SHOW OF HANDS, BUT STILL WITH 13 VOTES OPPOSED AND 14 ABSTENTIONS. THE EVENING BEFORE THE CONVENTION THE FDPS GOVERNING BOARD HAD VOTED 23 TO 2 FOR CONTINUING THE COALITION WITH THE SPD. THIS FACT WAS ANNOUNCED AT THE OPENING OF THE FLORSHEIM CONVENTION BUT ALONG WITH OTHER EFFORTS DID NOT CHOK OFF A DEBATE ON THE ISSUE. THE OPPOSING DELEGATES, LED BY FDP BUDESTAG DEPUTY KLAUS-JURGEN HOFFIE FROM DARMSTADT HAD, IN VARIOUS FORMS, PROPOSED THAT THE FDP NOT DECLARE ITSELF FOR EITHER BIG PARTY AS A COALITION PARTNER BUT HOLD THE QUESTION OPEN UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION OF OCTOBER8.

3. INITIAL REACTIONS FROM THE SPD AND THE CDU/CSU WERE ALONG PREDICTABLE LINES. SPEAKING FOR THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, BORNER PROFESSED TO SEE IN THE FDP'S DECISION A CONFIRMATION OF FAIR AND OBJECTIVE COOPERATION WITHIN THE SOCIAL/LIBERAL COALITION IN WIESBADEN. LEADING OFF FOR THE CDU ALFRED DREGGER PROMPTLY RELEASED A PREVIOUSLY PREPARED STATEMENT IN WHICH HE DECLARED THAT THE ELECTORAL BATTLE LINES ARE NOW CLEARLY DRAWN AND APPEALED TO THE VOTERS TO BREAK THE POLITICAL POWER "CARTEL" OF THE SPD/FDP IN HESSE. HE CALLED ON LIVERAL VOTERS TO NOW JOIN THE CDU AS THE ONLY PARTY PREPARED TO IMPLEMENT A LIBERAL RENEWAL IN THE STATE. THE SAME THEME WAS ECHOED IN INITIAL STATEMENTS BY CDU GENERAL MANAGER GEISSLER AND CSU BOSS FRANZ JOSEF STRAUSS.

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PAGE 03 FRANKF 04907 191405Z

4. COMMENT: THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE FREE DEMOCRATS HAVE THUS SUCCEEDED IN CRUSHING AN INCIPIENT REBELLION. THEY DID NOT, HOWEVER, SUCCEED IN AVOIDING OPEN CONFRONTATION AT FLORSHEIM AND CARRIED THE DAY THERE AT A COST. THE FACT THAT 38 PERCENT OF THE DELEGATES OPPOSED THE COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE THE COALITION WITH THE SPD SHOWS THE EXTENT OF THE SPLIT AMONG THE FREE DEMOCRATS WHICH CANNOT BE GLOSSED OVER BY THE SUBSEQUENT EFFORT UNANIMOUSLY - OR ALMOST - ENDORSE THE MAJORITY DECISION. MOREOVER, THE PRESSURES BROUGHT TO BEAR BY THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS SOMEWHAT HIGH-HANDED TACTICS USED TO LIMIT THE DEBATE ON JUNE 17 HAVE AROUSED RESENTMENT AMONG SOME DELEGATES. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THERE WILL BE SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS FROM THE PARTY BUT GIVEN THE FDP'S VERY THINS MARGIN OF SAFETY, EVEN A FEW DEFECTIONS WOULD HURT.

5. THE FREE DEMOCRATS THUS ENTER THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN DIVIDED AND BESET BY OTHER DANGERS SUCH AS THE THREAT FROM THE GREEN LIST ENVIRONMENTALISTS, A SENTIMENT OF SOME FDP ADHERENTS THAT THE PARTY WOULD BE BEST OFF BY REGENERATING ITSELF IN THE OPPOSITION, THE EXISTENCE OF A GOOD MANY CDU/FDP COALITIONS ON THE LOCAL LEVEL IN HESSE, AND A POSSIBILITY THAT

IN HESSE, AS IN LOWER SAXONY, A GOOD MANY FDP VOTERS WILL STAY AWAY FROM THE POLLS ON OCTOBER 8. IT IS THUS PROBLEMATICAL WHETHER LAST SATURDAY THE HESSIAN FDP FOUND THE RIGHT FORMULA FOR SURVIVAL -- IF, INDEED, ANY FORMULA IS POSSIBLE. THE PARTY LEADERSHIP, NATIONAL AND LOCAL, IS WELL AWARE OF THE DANGER AND WILL BE MAKING A VERY HEAVY INVESTMENT IN TIME AND ENERGY IN THE NEXT THREE AND A HALF MONTHS IN AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO ASSURE THE FDP'S CONTINUED PARLIAMENTARY EXISTENCE.LEHMANN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARTY UNITY, PARTY LINE, POLITICAL PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978FRANKF04907
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780255-0147
Format: TEL
From: FRANKFURT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780645/aaaabnca.tel
Line Count: 124
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2b034186-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 FRANKFURT 4697
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 31 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2303002
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HESSIAN FDP OPTS TO CONTINUE COALITION WITH SPD
TAGS: PINT, GE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2b034186-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014